

September 2015

Planning Commission Annual Report

City of Alexandria, Virginia

Special points of interest:

- Regulatory Cases
- Highlighted Projects
- Work Sessions
- Membership

FY2015 Annual Report

Summary of Activities

The following regulatory cases were considered by the Planning Commission in FY2015. FY2014 is included for comparison. With the exception of one Special Use Permit case, for which the Planning Commission recommended denial, all cases were either recommended for approval or approved, many with important changes recommended or approved.

Regulatory Cases		
	FY2014	FY2015
Special Use Permits (SUP)	49	55
Encroachments, Subdivisions and Vacations	11	21
Development Projects (DSP/DSUP)	20	29
Master Plan Amendments and Rezonings	13	16
Text Amendments	13	9
CDD Conceptual Design Plans	1	3
City Charter Section 9.06	4	1
Transportation Management Plans	5	9
Total	116	143

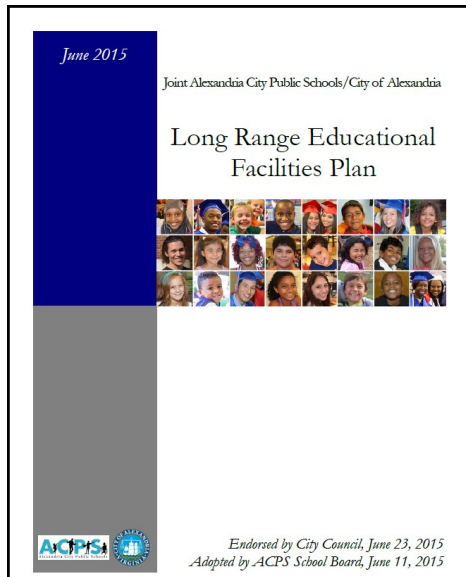
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Long Range Planning Projects

Oakville Triangle/Route 1 Corridor Plan

In November 2014, the Commission held a work session on the Oakville Triangle / Route 1 Corridor planning process that began in the spring. The corridor study is reviewing potential redevelopment sites along the western portion of Route 1, and developing urban design standards which will help to establish a unified streetscape and an integrated approach to future redevelopment along Route 1. The Plan will include principles and recommendations for land uses, heights, open space, transportation, urban design standards, and implementation and funding.



Eisenhower West Small Area Plan

In March 2015, the Commission held a work session on the Eisenhower West Small Area Plan that began in February 2014. The plan establishes a long term vision and framework for future redevelopment that maximizes its location near transit and regional road networks, and improves connectivity and the quality of life in the plan area. As part of this work session, the Planning also received an update on the Industrial Use Study, and the findings of the study related to both Eisenhower West and the Oakville Triangle/Route 1 Corridor Plan.

Long Range Educational Facilities Plan

In May 2015, the Commission received and discussed the Long Range Educational Facilities Plan. The Alexandria City Public School (ACPS) System and the City jointly developed this Plan to improve facilities planning, accommodate the growing student population, and enhance educational programs and services. The Plan was endorsed by City Council on June 23, 2015 and adopted by ACPS on June 11, 2015.

Other Special Projects

The Commission endorsed the revised [Public Art Policy](#) in December 2014, which will be included as part of the City's Public Art Plan.

In January 2015, the Commission received and discussed information on draft phasing and funding options for [Waterfront implementation](#).

An update on the [Draft Environmental Impact Statement \(DEIS\)](#) process for the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station was provided to the Commission in March 2015. In May, the Commission held a Public Hearing on the DEIS to select a preferred alternative location for a potential Metrorail station within Potomac Yard. The Commission recommended Alternative B, Option 2.

In March, the Commission received an update on Alexandria's [long-range forecast](#) for development in the City, prepared in cooperation with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. Also provided was summary data on the City's racial and ethnic groups and foreign-born population.

Zoning Text Amendments

The Commission initiated and recommended approval of a number of amendments to the City's zoning ordinance during FY 2015:

In March, the Planning Commission recommended approval of a text amendment so that a special use permit is now required for electrical substation and switching stations that are larger than 10,000 square feet in size in the UT/Utilities and Transportation Zone. This amendment ensures that larger electrical infrastructure facilities get a proper level of review since many sites in this zone are near residences, parks, and schools.

Zoning Text Amendments continued

Also in March, the Planning Commission recommended approval of a rezoning and a corresponding subdivision and special use permit to move zoning and property boundaries at the Douglas MacArthur School campus. The school building had been straddling two lots and was split into two different zones. The rezoning and subdivision adjusted boundaries in order for the school building to be entirely on one lot. The school site was also rezoned from R-12 to R-8 to facilitate its current building floor area ratio and to facilitate minor expansions that may occur in the future.

The Commission held a work session in January 2015 to review the results and draft recommendations of the Parking Standards for New Development Study. The study proposed updating parking standards that reflect existing parking demand and market trends. In April 2015, the Planning Commission approved a text amendment adopting the new standards recommended by the Study.

In September the Planning Commission recommended approval of a text amendment to allow outdoor food and craft markets to operate in the RCX/Medium Density Apartment Zone, RC/High Density Apartment Zone, RA/Multifamily Zone, and the RD/High Density Apartment Zone if they obtain special use permit approval. This amendment allows farmers markets to operate at larger apartment complexes and provides residents of those complexes, especially in areas that are not proximate to grocery stores, to have the opportunity to shop for fresh and healthy foods in locations that are convenient to their homes.

In October the Planning Commission recommended approval of a text amendment to make technical corrections to language in various sections of the Zoning Ordinance. This amendment repairs missing or erroneous language in the Zoning Ordinance without changing the meaning or intention of the affected ordinance sections.

Small Business Zoning

The Commission reviewed Special Use Permits for several new businesses. In October, for example, it recommended approval of a project that included a rezoning and Master Plan amendment for the creation of a new bed and breakfast hotel and restaurant at 329 N. Washington Street. The site contains a historic mansion that is to be converted into a 5-room bed and breakfast and is also to contain the new location of the popular restaurant [La Bergerie](#), which is to relocate from its current location on Lee Street. Citizens in opposition to the project have filed a lawsuit which prevents the business from moving forward at this time. Also, two unique new dining businesses have been granted special use permits and opened along King Street. A special use permit was issued to [Sonoma Cellar](#) to open at 207 King Street. This is a restaurant that specializes in California wines and provides wine tastings. Another special use permit was issued to [Blüprint Chocolatiers](#) to open at 1001 King Street. This business specializes in gourmet chocolates that are made on site and also serves high quality coffees, sandwiches, and deserts. All of these businesses add to Alexandria's tourism appeal.



The City is also getting a new type of attraction. The Commission approved a special use permit for the [Escape Room Live](#) to begin operations at 814 King Street. This business is a unique new amusement enterprise where customers play a team building game where they must 'escape' as a group from rooms by using clues and puzzles hidden in the furniture. It is a unique new type of business for Alexandria, and it adds a new activity offering for residents and visitors of Old Town.

Small Business Zoning continued

Elsewhere in the city, new businesses were granted special use permits to occupy the commercial areas of the recently completed Modera Tempo complex at South Pickett and South Van Dorn Streets. Approvals were granted for a new [Starbucks Coffee](#) and a new [Jimmy Johns Sandwich Shop](#). At 3000 Duke Street a large new restaurant was approved to replace the popular Generous George's [pizza parlor](#). The proposed new restaurant would have 448 total seats in a renovated building that would include a roof deck. At 515 Mt. Vernon Avenue in the Braddock Metro Station area, another large pizza parlor was also approved. Other approvals were granted throughout the City for business such as new fitness facilities, automobile repair businesses, and similar types of establishments.

Not every Planning Commission activity was an approval for a new business. The Commission also recommended denial for proposal that would have been highly inappropriate for its location because it would negatively impact the surrounding community. In September, the Commission recommended that a proposed metal recycling yard at 3640 Wheeler Avenue be denied because of the noise and traffic issues it would create for surrounding residents. That site is now proposed for a different, more suitable, land use.

Development Projects

FY2015 was another strong year for development projects reviewed by the Planning Commission. Two new projects to implement the Waterfront Plan, [Old Dominion Boat Club](#) and [Robinson Terminal South](#), were approved in the spring of 2015. In March, a new home for the Boat Club featuring distinctive, boathouse style architecture will be constructed at Prince and the Strand. The Robinson Terminal South project at Duke and the Strand (April 2015) will include 96 new residences, several restaurants and commercial space in the historically renovated building at 2 Duke Street. The landscape design for the proposed streets, waterfront promenade and restored pier will provide a first-class destination to attract tourists and residents to Alexandria's waterfront. The Planning Commission's advocacy for design excellence and implementing the Waterfront Plan during the hearing for this project was very important in this approval process.



The successful approvals of the [Fillmore](#) (February 2015) and [Pickett's Place](#) (November 2014) projects by the Commission in the City's west end highlight important redevelopment projects occurring in that area of the City. The Fillmore project contains two multifamily buildings, one market rate with 132 units and the other with 93 affordable housing units, a daycare facility and an attractive, new pedestrian mews connecting Echols Avenue with Fillmore Avenue. The Pickett's Place project near Duke and South Pickett Streets has been a priority for the community because it will replace an outdated bowling alley. It is a 48-unit, townhome community that will include four, for-sale, affordable units and a pedestrian mews to provide residences attractive open space and a gathering place in the new neighborhood. Both of these projects demonstrate the commitment to high quality redevelopment and the promotion of affordable housing by the Commission.

Senior housing was a notable development trend this fiscal year. [Goodwin House](#) (January 2015), [Alexandria Memory Care](#) (February 2015) and [Brandywine Senior Living](#) (June 2015) were all approved by the Planning Commission in the first six months of 2015. The new building at Goodwin House on Beauregard Avenue will update existing facilities with improved nursing and memory care units and redesigned open spaces for the residents. Alexandria Memory Care will be an important new, 66-unit facility in Alexandria for seniors seeking memory-related healthcare located on King Street next to the existing Woodbine Rehabilitation & Healthcare facility. The Planning Commission approved a CDD text amendment this year to permit senior housing as part of

Development Projects continued

the new Cameron Park development approved in 2014 at the corner of South Pickett Street and Cameron Station Boulevard. The amendment allows Brandywine Senior Living to occupy one of the proposed, multifamily buildings in Cameron Park, which will move this exciting mixed-use project forward more rapidly in the West end. These three projects help to address the lack of senior housing currently in the City. Also, the Planning Commission provided important leadership during the approval process for Alexandria Memory Care in addressing institutional uses in the City's Master Plan and zoning.

Significant nonresidential development activity occurred in FY 2015. The Planning Commission approved both a new office tower for [Hoffman Block 2](#) (March 2014) at Eisenhower Avenue and Stovall Street, and an adjustment to the previous development approvals for the [Victory Center](#) in West Eisenhower (November 2014) to attract the Transportation Security Administration to locate in Alexandria. The Commission extended development approvals for major office complexes along Eisenhower Avenue at [ATA - Block 20](#) (June 2015) and [Block P](#) (Date) at John Carlyle Street. In addition, retail expansions for the [Potomac Yard Center Target](#) (June 2015) and [Landmark Mall](#) (June 2015) were also approved.

This fiscal year also saw the approval of a number of infill development projects. [The Mill](#) (February 2015) located at the intersection of North Washington and Pendleton Streets will be an adaptive reuse and expansion of the historic cotton factory building that will contain 34 residential units and a new pocket park along North Washington Street. [1333 Powhatan Street](#) (October 2014) and [West Parc Townhouses](#) (November 2014) were two infill townhouse projects approved this year. While generally smaller in scale than projects elsewhere in the City, these infill developments require significant communications between the community, staff, and the BAR. The Planning Commission's focus on issues including parking, open space and streetscape improvements helped maintain neighborhood character with new development in these locations.

Planning Commission Retreat

In May 2015, the Planning Commission held a retreat at the Alexandria Police Station on Wheeler Avenue. Discussion items focused on the Planning Commission's role in impacting quality building design, earlier and broader engagement on planning projects and the Commission's business processes. The Planning Commission also received a presentation from General Services staff on the City Hall renovation feasibility study and workspace guidelines.

The retreat resulted in a number of action items that Planning and Zoning staff are working with the Planning Commission to complete. Among the action items, Staff agreed to provide regular reports with information about projects that are in the early review stages, explore the options for improving graphics and increased use of models to better represent development projects, provide the Commissioners with training on reading site plans and elevations, and review low-impact uses that could be approved by an administrative SUP, eliminating the requirement for a public hearing. The Commissioner's agreed to review and update their by-laws and identified discussion topics for future work sessions.

Work Sessions

The Planning Commission held work sessions to discuss the following topics:

November 6, 2014	Oakville Triangle/Route 1 Corridor
January 6, 2015	Parking Standards for New Development Study
June 2, 2015	Oakville Triangle/Route 1 Corridor

Membership

Eric Wagner ended his 20+ years of service on the Planning Commission in January 2015. Derek Hyra resigned from the Planning Commission in July 2014. City Council appointed two new members in FY2015 – Stephen Koenig (February) and Mindy Lyle (October). In March, the Commission held elections for officers of chairman and vice chairman. Mary Lyman was elected chairman and Stewart Dunn was reelected as vice chairman for one year. All members attended at least 75% of the scheduled meetings. The attendance record follows:

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS MEETINGS ATTENDANCE REPORT

JULY 1, 2014 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2015

COMMISSION: Planning Commission

CHAIRS: Eric R. Wagner (March 2014-January 2015) and Mary Lyman (beginning March 2015)

NAME	Jul	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr 7	Apr 9	May	Jun 2	Jun 4
Eric R. Wagner	E	X	X	X	X	X	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Stewart Dunn	X	E	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	E
Maria Wasowski	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Nathan Macek	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mary Lyman	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Derek Hyra	X	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mindy Lyle	N/A	N/A	X	X	X	X	X	E	X	X	E	X	X
David Brown	X	E	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Stephen Koenig	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	E	X	X	X	X	X	X

INDICATE: (X) PRESENT; (E) EXCUSED, (U) UNEXCUSED

LIST OF THOSE WHO DID NOT ATTEND 75% OF MEETINGS: **None**

*The Planning Commission is in recess during the month of August.

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*Membership continued***Planning Commission Membership on Other Groups**

Other Board or Commission	Planning Commission Members
Transportation Commission	Nathan Macek (chair), Maria Wasowski
Waterfront Commission	H. Stewart Dunn
Potomac Yard Metrorail Implementation Group	Stephen Koenig (from Feb 15), Eric R. Wagner (Jul 14 to Jan 15)
ARHA Redevelopment Work Group	Mary Lyman
Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Group	David Brown
Eisenhower West Steering Committee	Mindy Lyle (chair)
Oakville Triangle/Route 1 Advisory Group	Maria Wasowski (chair)
Parking Task Force for New Development	Nathan Macek (chair)
Corridor C Policy Advisory Group	David Brown
Ad Hoc Group for Digital Signs and Portable A-Frame	Nathan Macek (chair)

Other Planning Commission Information

The Planning Commission is appointed by City Council and performs its duties under Chapter 9 of the City Charter, Section 6.14 of the City Charter, and applicable portions of Sections 15.2-2223 and 2225 of the Virginia Code as implemented through various sections of the Zoning Ordinance and City Code. It is charged with adopting, reviewing and amending the City's master plan and making recommendations to City Council for final approval. It is also charged with making final decisions on subdivision and site plan cases, and making recommendations to Council on map amendments, text amendments, special use permits, development special use permits, encroachments and vacation proposals.

The Commission's choice of leadership is covered in its bylaws and involves the election of officers on an annual basis in March; elections this year are described in the summary of activities. As called for in the by laws, it is the vote of the Commission that determines the turnover in leadership.

Questions? Please contact Planning and Zoning staff at 703.746.4666 or email the Planning Commission at PlanComm@alexandriava.gov .
